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ABSTRACT

Human resources development sees human beings as the means to socioeconomic development. This differs from human development which sees human beings as the immediate and ultimate goals and ends of socio-economic development. Arab states have tended to utilize the human resources development approach as part of their forecasting of manpower requirements and economic growth targets. This paper argues that such an approach is detrimental to the educational processes of these countries because it results in neglect of the needs of a large portion of the population. Basic educational and social needs are lost when educational planning is focused solely on preparing students for rigid and fixed jobs. (DB)

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EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

WITH REFERENCE TO ARAB COUNTRIES

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EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT WITH REFERENCE TO ARAB COUNTRIES

When human being are considered as the means to socio-economic development, this is taken in this paper to mean human resources (or manpower development) but when human beings are considered as the immediate and ultimate goals and ends of socio-economic development, this is taken to mean human development in general. This distinction between these two concepts will facilitate our analysis but we should always bear in mind that the two concepts are highly inter-related.

It is clear that the concept of human resources development is mainly an economic concept and this implies that rate of return in developing these resources through investment in education (and also health, nutrition and other services) can be measured and compared with return from investment in physical capital so that resource allocation equilibrium can be obtained. Many techniques have been used or proposed to be used to assess and evaluate educational and training investments. The most widely used techniques are manpower requirements approach and cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness technique.

We believe that the application of human resources development approach as defined here might distort human development and indeed the whole process of education development by neglecting a large proportion of the population particularly in basic education and other basic social needs as well as by directing education to be narrowly concerned with preparing students for rigid and fixed jobs. However, we intend here to concentrate on analysing this approach as it has been applied widely in most developing countries including the Arab countries. The aim is to show planners in general and educational planners in particular that their obsession of planning techniques can be very misleading and lead to seriously negative results for both educational planning and development efforts in general.

As human resources development is applied in most Arab countries from the point of view of manpower requirements approach, this paper is mainly concerned with the inter-relationship between education and training and manpower planning. Here socio-economic planners attempt to calculate future requirements of different types of labour to enable them to meet the economic targets. Of course, this would mean that education and training systems should be designed or modified in order to produce the skills and knowledge required. It is assumed in most development plans of Arab countries that there is complete association between occupational groups and educational levels.

Manpower requirements (demand) forecasting rests on the planned economic growth targets and the planned or expected productivity trends during the plan period. It is also assumed that there is a strong link between occupational structure and productivity levels in various economic sectors.

For example, Saudi Arabia Third Plan (1980-1985) targeted positive growth rates of GDP for all sectors except construction and for the whole non-oil economy the annual growth rate was planned to be 6.2% and productivity was anticipated to increase by 5% per annum during the plan period. Labour force requirements by sectors and occupational groups were forecasted accordingly and planned to grow at 1.2% per annum for the non-oil economy. However, the assumed relationship even for the whole economy did not come true. Instead productivity of labour had been decreasing through out the whole plan period by an average of 3.0% per annum and employment increased at an average annual rate of 8.0% which is much higher than the targeted rate of 1.2%.

Of course, the inaccuracy of these forecasts is much more serious in the case of various types of occupation particularly for certain economic sectors.

After the planners forecast their requirements from skilled manpower then they move to the availability (supply) side of skilled human rescurces. Here they depend entirely on the formal education system to provide them with their requirements. Here it is assumed that educational qualifications (or in fact certificates, diplomas and degrees) from different levels of education can be easily converted into occupational groups.

All Arab plans adopting this approach assume that professionals and managers should have a University degree, technicians and assistant professionals a college diploma, skilled office workers a secondary or some post-secondary education, skilled manual workers a secondary and intermediate technical education or formal vocational training. However, analyses of censuses and surveys data in several Arab countries shows that association between education and occupation is not as strong as assumed and in fact very weak for many occupations. For example, in Qatar, only 60% of those classified in managerial categories have graduated or dropped out of higher education institutes and more than 10% are found to be illiterates. Also a high percentage of professionals and technicians have not entered or completed higher education. Furthermore, educational qualifications of the labour force has been changing very rapidly during the past few decades. The qualifications of the younger generations (measured by their paper certificates) is higher than that of older workers who might have acquired immense practical experience and have higher productivity.

This manpower approach for educational planning has been followed in the majority of Arab countries. This approach has not only failed in its own right as can be seen from the examples above, but more important it has serious and negative consequences for both educational planning and manpower policies.

Some further examples of contractions and indicators of the inaccuracies of the forecasting itself can be given.

In many, if not all, Arab Human Resource Plans we find quantitative figures showing serious imbalances of different types of labour availability or labour-requirements. Usually the planners claim acute shortages of professionals and technicians, but these cannot be consistent with wide spread open unemployment among graduates of agriculture, engineering and science faculties. More often than not, the unemployment of graduates (claimed to be short supply) exists while the government sector or the private sector or both import and employ a high proportion of expatriates and high and middle level of manpower. If the government itself resorts to foreign workers this would most likely mean that nationals are not sufficiently qualified for the job. This also means that the quality of education must be very low. Of course, the forecasting usually ignores completely the quality aspect of education and training as well as the practical experience and the on-the-job training of workers.

As a result of this approach as well as increasing social demand, post-secondary education has expanded rapidly. However, it seems that students are more interested in the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Therefore, it can be expected that the expansion would naturally be accompanied by dramatic decline in the quality of education.

But even in this situation, planners fail either to forecast the number of graduates or school leavers to be available or to direct the students to pursue certain specializations believed to be in short supply. In fact, many Arab plans assume rapid expansion in technical education and in certain specializations in the faculties of medicine, science or engineering. However, most plans have not taken into consideration the number of students with relevant and acceptable qualifications or the motives and interest of the students in these specializations.

This is so inspite of the fact that the proportion of students studying sciences and mathematics at the secondary level is very small, not exceeding one third or our fourth of total students in many Arab countries. In addition, it seems that studying science based subjects is

either undesirable or difficult because drop-out rate is very high particularly in the oil-rich Arab countries, while social science and arts subjects are comparatively easy and better still there is some guarantee of securing a government job after graduation.

For these reasons, the achievement of many development plans for reaching their targets is very poor. In fact, the objectives and targets set by the planners differs much from what has actually been achieved in many countries. For example, the Saudi second five-year plan failed to achieve more than 43% of its target in expanding technical and vocational education and much less than this in the desirable fields and specializations. However, targets in general academic secondary school education and university education had been exceeded by 42% and 60% respectively.

In assessing quantitative forcasting of difficult types of occupations by various economic sectors, it seems that the most valuable and reliable predictions are those occupations in the educational sector (particularly those of teachers) and in the health sector (particularly of doctors, nurses and some medical technicians). But again, the projected supply which is supposed to be the target of educational plans failed in many countries to meet the projected demand. In some case plans resulted in acute shortages as in the case of nurses & medical technicians and science, maths, music, and sports teachers. In others there has been increasing surplus especially in teachers of certain subjects such as religion, and social science subjects.

Most attempts of forecasting demand for engineers and related technicians seem to be a complete failure. This is particularly the case for some types of engineers such as architects and civil enigneers who are considerably affected by the expansion or contraction of an economy. Also there seems to be a significant mobility between engineers and technicians. Furthermore, many persons in these occupations seem to qualify for the job as a result of experience rather than through formal education or training.

Although most plans include forecasts for what they call scientific manpower, there is no clear cut definition of what occupations could fall into this category in terms of educational standard or task performed. Although many of science graduates are employed as teachers, many employed as administrators and clerical personnel and therefore they do not have to use their knowledge as scientists. If fact, a high proportion of workers are occupying jobs for which they have not been trained or educated.

The close link assumed between occupations and educational qualifications cannot be applicable to certain categories of occupation. Managerial manpower is usually assumed in the plans as having higher education qualification. But as we know the management function is exercised in varying degrees from the lowest level of a surpervisor to the top most executive of a huge enterprise of under-Secretary of an important government department or ministry. In the private sector there is hardly any linkage between managerial and administrative occupations and a certain level of education.

It is obvious then that the methodology and accuracy of manpower forecasting could be very misleading. In addition, this approach has serious impacts. As all development plans are short or medium-term plans (usually five years) and mainly concerned with existing needs, interest will concentrate in those human resources either in the working ages or those expected to enter the labour market during the plan period. This is likely to lead to allotment of lower value or belated priority to other stages of human growth, mainly childhood and in particular primary school children. In fact there has been increasing bias towards higher education as economic planners are claiming that they have scientific methods to enable them to know exactly the different types of specializations required to meet their economic targets. Unfortunately it seems that educators seem to respond blindly to these claims.

As the manpower approach (particularly projectionss of supply) is mainly concerned with wage employment in the former sector, this would not only mean increasing bias towards formal post-primary and higher education, but a neglect of a large proportion of the population in informal urban sectors and the rural areas who are not conversant with most elementary of skills.

For the Arab region as a whole, the illiteracy ratio among those fifteen years and over was about 50% in 1985 and with present trends expected not to below 35% by the year 2000. This would mean that the absolute number of illiterate persons will increase from about 50 million in 1985 to 55 million by the turn of the century. Thus while the plans are concerned with increasing rapidly the agricultural graduates, these graduates are either unemployed or involved in administrative jobs and their contribution to agriculture production is limited while almost all production in the traditional agriculture and most on-line direct production in modernized agriculture is performed by illiterate or semi-literate peasants or agriculture workers.

Of course, mass illiteracy combined with rigid and decreasing educational quality can be a stumbling block to development including human resources development.

It is therefore essential for manpower planners in directing education to meet the requirements of manpower to consider the role of all levels and types of education. Expanding and strengthening elementary education is essential if subsequent levels are to be successful in linking the form and content of education with manpower requirements and human development.

It is important to emphasize, however, it would be dangerous to plan for education from an economic point of view and to confine the need of knowledge to specific and predetermined specializations. The rapid and fundamental changes occuring in this age and in all

countries with its various and increasing requirements might dictate new and urgent demand of labour and this needs a much more flexible and advanced mode of education able to respond to the various evolving needs of the society. What is required from the schools and higher education institutes is not just the mere transition of knowledge but to educate their students the ability to think critically and the ability to go on learning throughout the whole of their lives. This would, no doubt, enable them to be occupationally more mobile and thus more able to adapt their learning in a continuously changing society.

Educational planners should be more concerned with providing strong basic knowledge in both scientific and technological fields as well as in humanities. Higher education should also be flexible but instead of the rapid expansion that results eventually in increasing number of unemployed graduates, admission should be restricted to those with talent and capacity.

Learning a skill to qualify for a rigidly defined job might lead to more imbalances instead of meeting assumed manpower requirements.

What is needed in this regard from both manpower planners and educational planners is not only forecasts or projections (even if based on careful analysis of data and trends) but in-depth surveys of both the function of labour markets and the educational institutions and follow-up studies on recent school and higher institutes leavers and graduates in order to continuously assess the external efficiency of education.

In this connnection, it must be emphasized that achieving effective educational planning and human resources development depends on the persence of conscious, dynamic and competent leadership to guide the process.